Christ Church Elbow Park Archives

Interview with Meredith Cashion

Christ Church Elbow Park Oral History Project 2020

Interviewer: Jeanette King

16 December 2020

1:30 PM

Zoom Interview

Transcript of Meredith Cashion

Interviewed on 16 Dec. 2020

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Interviewed by Jeanette King

Jeanette King, Interviewer

Meredith Cashion, Narrator

Jeanette King: My name is Jeanette King, and this is an interview with Meredith Cashion on December the 16th, 2020 at 1:30 PM. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, this interview is being conducted over Zoom. Welcome, Meredith, and thank you for participating in the Christ Church Oral History Project. This interview is being recorded for the Christ Church archives and will be made available to researchers. You'll be given a transcript of the recording and will have the opportunity to review it and reconsider any portions of the interview at that time. Is that all right with you?

Meredith Cashion: That's perfectly fine. Thank you, Jeanette.

Jeanette: When did you start attending Christ Church?

Meredith: We started attending Christ Church in 1982. We were married at Christ Church in 1983 and we've been going ever since.

Jeanette: What made you choose this parish?

Meredith: That is actually quite an interesting little aside. My husband, Pat was a very faithful church-going Catholic. He'd been divorced and we did not have the opportunity to marry in the Catholic church. I had been raised an Anglican and we were living in the community, so we chose Christ Church.

Jeanette: What particular parish activities have you been involved in? I know that both of you have made a large contribution to the church.

Meredith: I have been involved. Because I had small children, I started off in Sunday school or nursery. For many years, I taught baptism to parents who wished to baptize their children. I've

taught confirmation classes. I've been involved in Collective Kitchen, I've been in Altar Guild since 1988. I was a pastoral care minister for about 16 years.

Jeanette: Your involvement has been huge. Let's talk about the Altar Guild involvement. Would you explain the function of Altar Guild?

Meredith: The Altar Guild has been around for a long time, actually. The first record of Altar Guild we have is about 1912 or 1913, but we don't have much information until the early 1930s, when we find that the Altar Guild is organized very similarly to what it is today, in that, we have four groups. Each group is responsible for one week, and the Altar Guild helps the clergy in caring for anything to do with the altar. That is setting up for the Eucharist services. We set up for weddings and funerals. We set up for special festive days like Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving.

Anything to do with the altar, is an Altar Guild requirement. We have added to that over the years. We've purchased hangings. We've purchased things for the church. We replace chalices as necessary, and the hangings are extremely expensive. Up until about 10 years ago, the Altar Guild charged a fee to belong to the organization. Ansley Tucker felt that a church organization should not require a membership fee, so that fee was taken out about 10 years ago.

Jeanette: How are the duties divided between the members, other than the fact that there are four separate weeks of duties?

Meredith: Duties vary depending on the week. Christmas tends to fall on Week 4, but Easter varies from year to year. Thanksgiving varies. Whatever week of the month that those holidays fall on, it's the requirement of that particular group — Group 1, 2, 3, or 4, corresponding with the weeks — to fulfill those particular duties. For example, during Thanksgiving, if it is on the second week, Group 2 would be responsible for decorating the church, buying the produce to decorate the church, and making sure that the church is looking like a harvest theme festive. Easter and Christmas tend to be a bigger decoration process, so we do tend to get the entire membership involved.

Now, the membership has, in the last 10 or 15 years, dwindled substantially. When I started in 1988, there were probably 20 women per group. It's always been women. Group membership is probably about eight now. As women take on more roles outside the house, we've had serious membership issues.

Jeanette: What are some of the duties that you have had with Altar Guild?

Meredith: I've been everything in Altar Guild. Let's see, I was president from 2008 and '09, but then I was also president from 2014 to 2019. I've been the linen convener, and the linen convener makes sure that all the altar cloths are ironed. It take six people to iron one altar cloth, and we would do that about four times a year. It takes six people to iron one altar cloth because they are extremely long (probably 15 feet, but I haven't been in the church so long, I can't remember),

they are 100% linen, they have to be damp to be ironed, and they have to be rolled immediately after. Three people stand on one side of a table, three on the other side and even then it has to ironed in sections. It takes 30 minutes to iron one cloth. We use one usually for a couple of months except at Easter and Christmas when a clean cloth will be used.

I have never been the treasurer and that's probably a good thing. That's not my strength. We don't require a treasurer, since we stopped taking dues. Most of our money now goes through the church. Before, we were a separate entity completely and we handled all our own money. Now, it does go through the church. We do have about $18,000, though, in the church accounts that is Altar Guild money, and we're hoping at some point to get a new altar.

Jeanette: Wonderful. Now, which one of the duties gave you the most satisfaction?

Meredith: You get very attached to your group, and I was in Group 2 for many, many years. When I started, I was a reasonably young woman; I was probably 26 and there were some older women in my group who really helped me along. When I joined Altar Guild in 1988, you had to be asked by the rector to join Altar Guild. Usually, he was asking you was because your husband had been appointed to vestry. Herbert O'Driscoll asked me in 1988, and I thought it was a frivolous job. I thought it was a very female-oriented job. My first order of business was to change the registry, so I would not appear as Mrs. John Patrick Cashion.

Jeanette: How times have changed.

Meredith: How times have changed. When I first joined, I must say, I thought, "Well, this is really a meaningless job," but those older women really surrounded me: Mary Selby, Drina Barton, Jean Funnell, Pat Burns. They really took me under their wing. If I just had another baby, they would say, "Oh dear, you don't have to show up to do that. Oh, dear, I'll take your ironing. You have way too much to do." I really learned a lot from those women who were very spiritual about what they were doing.

They really saw it as a service, which it is. I just came a long way from thinking, "Well, this is just women's work," to, "This is a gift offered to the church, and it is a ministry."

Jeanette: Wonderful. Thank you for that background. Now, might there have been some unusual happenings during your time in Altar Guild?

Meredith: The renovation that happened probably 10 years ago was really challenging for the Altar Guild, because the vestry closed. We had nowhere to wash up after services. We were carrying basins of water from the bathroom to the quiet room to wash chalices and things like that. That must have gone on for probably eight months and it was very challenging. When I started in Altar Guild the water from the sink that we used had to go directly into the ground, because it was sacred water. You had to take anything that you were washing and take it outside and pour it on the ground. Something like that has changed, also.

Jeanette: Well, it was a good change, wasn't it?

Meredith: It was a very good change. The vestry is much easier to access now for the Altar Guild. We have places for linen, we have places for hangings, we have places for wedding decorations, and that kind of thing.

Jeanette: Much better organized.

Meredith: Much.

Jeanette: Well, that's an example of how Altar Guild has changed over the years. How do you see the Altar Guild evolving in the future?

Meredith: That is a very good question. We don't have people at home anymore on Friday mornings. Lots of women who are the age of my daughters and daughters-in-law work full-time. We're going to have to look at how we can minister to the clergy, as well as how we can be accommodating to the congregation. We've looked at inviting, say, a husband-wife team, or we've looked at men coming onto the Altar Guild. We've looked at changing from Friday to Saturday for the procedure of getting the church ready for Sunday. Many things are going to have to change.

I know there are a lot of churches, David Pickett will tell you this, that operate with a group of five people on their Altar Guild. We've always operated, in my lifetime, with a group of between 40 and 70 people on the Altar Guild. In total, we're sitting probably now at about 36. That makes everybody's job more onerous. One of the things that we like to say when we get members, or have in the past, got members for Altar Guild is we're extremely flexible. A lot of people travel. If they couldn't work on a particular week, that was fine. We had a number of spares on each group, and we don't have those resources anymore.

Jeanette: The Altar Guild creates and cares for a spiritual space for the parish. How has your membership impacted your own spirituality?

Meredith: Hugely. As I say, I really learned something from that group of older women. When you work with a group of people once a month for 30 or 40 years, you get to know them, you get to hear their journeys, and you get to hear how everybody goes to church for a different reason. It's not like being in the Rotary Club where you're all there for the same purpose. I think everybody goes to church for different reasons in their lives.

The Altar Guild has shown me the sense of mystery in the Anglican Church, particularly with the meaning behind all the vestments, the hangings, because we are a liturgical church. All of those things have meaning, where things are in the church, how you place chalices and purificators have demonstrated to me the symbolic nature of the Anglican Church and the symbolisms are real.

Jeanette: Lots of traditions behind them all.

Meredith: Lots of tradition.

Jeanette: Is there anything you would like to add?

Meredith: I do think one of the people who would be good to speak to regarding Altar Guild would be Kay Grove or Drina Barton, who are older than I am. Both of those women were wardens at a time when women weren't wardens. Drina was involved in the Altar Guild until she was 82. They might provide a different perspective on the Altar Guild.

One of the other things that the Altar Guild has done for as long as I've been around is any flowers that are placed in the church are taken by the Altar Guild to parishioners, or to parishioners in hospital, or parishioners in their own home, for either a joyous occasion, a sad occasion, or if there's a sickness in the house.

I think that that's a lovely ministry. People really enjoy getting those flowers, they enjoy getting the cards that pastoral care writes for the flowers, but it is the Altar Guild who delivers those flowers. That's quite a big responsibility for people after church if they have other commitments, but we drive those flowers anywhere in the city.

Jeanette: Thank you very much for your in-depth explanation of Altar Guild. You've covered many parts of what is involved in Altar Guild.

Meredith: Thanks so much.

Jeanette: Hopefully, I'll see you in church before long. Thank you, Meredith.

Meredith: I hope so too, Jeanette. Altar Guild has played a very meaningful part in my life. I've really enjoyed it and I will continue to participate in this valuable ministry.

Jeanette: Terrific. Thank you so much. Merry Christmas to you.

Meredith: Thank you. You too. Bye-bye.

Jeanette: Bye-bye.